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SUBJECT: TEACHERS HOPE TO FORM FIRST "SUPER" UNION

REF: A. MANAGUA 1083

[¶](#)B. MANAGUA 1495

Classified By: Charge Peter Brennan for reasons 1.4(B,D)

[¶](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Democratic teachers' unions hope to form a national alliance ("Central") in order to gain negotiating power with the Ortega government and more effectivley contest the alliance between Education Minister Miguel De Castilla and pro-Sandinista teachers' union ANDEN. Union leaders will announce their plans to form a Central on June 29, National Teachers' Day. Nicaraguan human rights NGO, Nicaraguan Permanent Commission for Human Rights (CPDH) is supporting this effort. END SUMMARY.

[¶](#)2. (C) In a June 14 meeting with poloff, leaders from two of the seven largest unions comprising the informal United Teachers Union (USM) revealed plans to form a "super" union - called a "Central" over the next few months. Doing so would enable the education sector's democratic labor movement to contest the negotiating power of ANDEN, the government-aligned labor union that negotiated an agreement with De Castilla that caused a two-month stand-off between teachers and the Ministry, and brought the education sector to the brink of revolt (reftel A).

Current Landscape of Teachers' Unions

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[¶](#)3. (SBU) The Nicaraguan national education system includes approximately 39,000 teachers, represented, roughly, by 23 labor unions. The largest single union, ANDEN, headed by Jose Antonio Zepeda, claims to have about 20,000 members nationwide. ANDEN is aligned with the current government. Eleven unions are aligned with the Nicaraguan National Teachers Confederation (CNMN), headed by Carlos Bojorge, who is leading the current opposition movement against ANDEN. The remaining teachers are scattered between the other 11 unions and have mixed ideological alliances. Further complicating the landscape is the United Teachers Union (USM). According to Bojorge, USM is not a legal union or confederation, but a democratic labor movement that includes members of CNMN and, claims Bojorge, the majority of the otherwise non-aligned unions.

[¶](#)4. (SBU) During the February-April unrest in the education sector this year, Bojorge and leaders of six independent unions, led the opposition against Minister De Castilla and ANDEN in the name of the USM movement. As such, USM claimed to represent some 16,000 teachers (vs. 20,000 for ANDEN) and over 17 separate unions (the eleven formally aligned under CNMN plus the unions of each of the six leaders that united with Bojorge's CNMN). During the two-month conflict, USM became a household name, appearing almost daily on the

front-page of the national newspapers. However, at this point, USM, according to Bojorge, is not a formally incorporated labor confederation.

Exploiting the Labor Law

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¶15. (C) Fearing that further collusion between ANDEN and De Castilla will continue to undermine other unions, Bojorge and others hope to exploit article 228 of the Nicaraguan Labor Code (Law 185). Article 228 specifies that two legal labor confederations within the same guild can form a "Central" - a "super" confederation that would trump any single union or confederation in labor negotiations. Although written into the labor code, this article has never been exercised in the education sector because, under the previous three Liberal governments, democratic teachers' unions always had the upper hand against the larger ANDEN and never contemplated government action against them.

Opposition's Plan - Putting the Cart Before the Horse

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¶16. (C) On June 29, National Teachers' Day, Bojorge and the other union leaders backing the USM movement, plan to publicly sign an agreement announcing the creation of USM as a Central. As a show of worker solidarity and support for the idea, USM leaders plan to invite 800 workers, if they can secure a location and funding. CPDH has agreed to help organize the event to further capitalize on the momentum created by USM during teachers' work stoppage to advance its own human rights agenda (reftel B).

¶17. (C) The problem, however, is that there is no second labor confederation allied with CNMN at this time. By pre-announcing their plan, Bojorge and others have shown their hand, potentially giving ANDEN time to find or form its own counterpart confederation to form a Central. It could become a race to see who can first create a second confederation and a Central. Bojorge believes that most of the eleven "non-aligned" unions are predisposed towards the USM, but underlined the need to meet face-to-face with union representatives at the department level. He indicated that he and other USM leaders were working with CPDH to develop an aggressive plan to visit the departments. By October, Bojorge hopes to have USM registered as a Central.

Comment

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¶18. (C) Bojorge, the driving force behind this labor strategy, appears to be the right man for the job. In contrast to the stereotypical firebrand labor leader, he is serious, quiet, and has strong analytical skills. He knows Nicaraguan labor laws and has a clear vision for creating a unified labor movement. Aligning with CPDH was a smart move because it elevates his struggle out of the labor arena, broadening the potential support base while giving him access to experienced well-connected organizers and some additional financial resources. If Bojorge and company can move fast enough -- taking advantage of the goodwill and brand recognition built-up during the work stoppage -- their goal of rapidly creating a second confederation and completing the bureaucratic process to create a Central is feasible.

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